

Message Text

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PAGE 01 BANGKO 03040 310825Z
ACTION EA-12

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: SHUM, TH
SUBJECT: "THAMMASAT 18" TRIAL CONTINUES ITS SLOW PROGRESS

REF: BANGKOK 24155

1. THE TRIAL OF THE "THAMMASAT 18" CONTINUED JAN. 30 WITH DEFENSE LAWYERS CROSS-EXAMINING THE FIRST WITNESS, COLONEL SAKHON SUWANNA, A POLICE OFFICER WHO MONITORED THE ACTIVITIES OF THE NATIONAL STUDENT CENTER OF THAILAND (NSCT) DURING THE EARLY 1970S. SPECTATORS PACKED THE COURTROOM. HOWEVER, THE CROWD GATHERED OUTSIDE THE COURTROOM TO LISTEN TO THE TRIAL VIA A LOUDSPEAKER SYSTEM WAS SMALLER THAN AT PREVIOUS SESSIONS. BOTH PARTICIPANTS AND SPECTATORS WERE RELAXED, AND THE CONDUCT OF THE TRIAL WAS ROUTINE. PRESS AND DIPLOMATIC INTEREST IN THE TRIAL HAS DIMINISHED. THE TRIAL IS NO LONGER REPORTED AS A FRONT-PAGE STORY BY THE LOCAL PRESS. IN CONTRAST TO THE EARLIER SESSIONS OF THE TRIALS ATTENDED BY REPRESENTATIVES FROM A NUMBER OF EMBASSIES, ONLY THE GERMAN AND THE U.S. EMBASSIES SENT REPRESENTATIVES TO THE MOST RECENT SESSION, AND THE GERMAN DIPLOMAT DEPARTED DURING THE LUNCH REAK.

2. SIX DEFENSE LAWYERS CROSS-EXAMINED COL. SAKHON AND DREW FROM HIM THE ADMISSION THAT NSCT ACTIVITIES PRIOR
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TO THE MILITARY TAKEOVER ON OCTOBER 6, 1976, WERE LEGAL

UNDER THE CONSTITUTION OF 1974 THEN IN FORCE. THE PROSECUTION RESUMED QUESTIONING, AND SAKHON SHOULD COMPLETE HIS TESTIMONY IN THE NEXT TRIAL SESSION.

3. ONE REASON FOR THE SLOW PACE OF THE TRIAL IS THAT

THE THAI COURTS DO NOT EMPLOY A STENOGRAPHER TO RECORD TESTIMONY. INSTEAD, THE JUDGE ACTS AS RECORDER FOR THE TRIAL. DURING THE TESTIMONY OF EACH WITNESS THE JUDGE TAKES LONGHAND NOTES ON THE PROCEEDINGS, AND THE QUESTIONING IS PACED ACCORDINGLY. AT THE END OF EACH COURT SESSION THE JUDGE READS BACK HIS NOTES, MAKING APPROPRIATE CORRECTIONS AT THE REQUEST OF THE PROSECUTION AND THE DEFENSE. THE PARTICIPANTS THEN SIGN THE JUDGE'S LONGHAND SUMMARY, WHICH BECOMES THE OFFICIAL RECORD.

4. TRIAL SESSIONS ARE SET FOR FEBRUARY 6, 13, 20, AND 27, CONTINUING THE PRACTICE OF ONE SESSION A WEEK.
WHITEHOUSE

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Message Attributes

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